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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0965
INFO RUEHX/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA 3445
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR 2329
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 002758

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SUBJECT: BORDER REACTION: MEXICO WORRIES ABOUT "THE WALL"

REF: Mexico 2637

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Embassy and Consulates continued intensive outreach on border issues with key media figures, the campaigns and political parties. While the GOM initially maintained a remarkably unified public line accepting U.S. border security initiatives, the attitude changed dramatically after the U.S. Senate approved a border "wall," spurring the same ill-informed public reactions we saw last year. The tide turned quickly as President Fox decried the "wall" while touring Baja California, SRE issued and quickly publicized a diplomatic note expressing concerns over U.S. actions on the border generally, and Foreign Secretary Derbez convoked the solidarity of his Central

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American colleagues. For all that, the criticism of the Fox Administration continues to build, and media are waiting for new polls to show whether the PAN candidate Calderon has taken a corollary hit. End Summary

Pushing the Word Out

¶2. (U) Continuing reftel efforts, the Ambassador pre-taped and PAS placed sound-bites explaining the link between border control and comprehensive migration reform, reiterating President Bush's commitment to reform, and explaining U.S. legislative prospects. PAS followed up with calls to key media figures, while POL continued outreach to the campaigns. U.S. consulates in Mexico also continued aggressive outreach with press and political contacts. We succeeded in getting a number of commentators to acknowledge that the border control measures informed the ongoing U.S. Senate debate, and press coverage of that debate has generally been balanced.

Falling Off the Wall

¶3. (U) While the GOM maintained a balanced reaction (reftel), it did so at a mounting public cost and changed gears quickly after the U.S. Senate approved (in conjunction with some migration measures) the construction of fences along some parts of the border. Public concern was quickly manifest, with even the industrial umbrella organization CANACINTRA suggesting in a public statement the "wall" would impede business and inhibit new investment. Almost immediately SRE announced it was sending a protest note to the U.S., and in a press release late 5/18 detailed its concerns about the rights of Mexicans along the border in light of National Guard deployments and other U.S. border initiatives, all allegedly described in the note (which we haven't yet seen). Derbez also convoked his Central

American counterparts to provide solidarity for Mexico's concerns and stress their firm but respectful opposition to the "wall." Finally, President Fox told audiences in Mexicali 5/18 that walls should not be constructed between business partners, friends and neighbors, while at the same time applauding some measures approved by the U.S. Senate.

¶4. (SBU) A National Action Party (PAN) deputy and regular contact of the Embassy said it was virtually impossible to have a reasoned conversation focused on the balance between border security and immigration reform. The rhetoric in the Mexican press was just too strong for that, and he accused the other two parties, Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) and Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), of playing this strictly as a U.S. vs. Mexico issue. He said the election season made it unlikely anyone in Mexico could avoid criticizing U.S. measures to increase border security. He criticized the other parties' presidential candidates for saying Fox is not doing enough to stand up to the U.S. on this issue, explaining that there was nothing either of them could do differently under the same circumstances.

Sticks and Stones in the Campaigns

¶5. (U) The presidential campaigns almost universally reacted to the U.S. measures by criticizing Fox's foreign policy. Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) called Fox a "puppet" of the U.S. and a "straw man" for not reacting more forcefully to the U.S. National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderon said a wall built along the border is not a good signal. Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) candidate Roberto Madrazo insisted the U.S. measures reflected the Fox government's failure to secure the border areas and

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establish a good bilateral relationship.

¶6. (SBU) A PRD deputy close to the AMLO campaign told us his candidate would not hesitate to attack Fox over the border security issue, but would refrain from attacking the U.S. He gave credit to the GOM for trying to present a balanced picture, but agreed with his PAN colleague that public upset over the issue was overwhelming. He admitted privately that there was little Mexico could do to prevent the U.S. measures, acknowledged that important discussion of migration reform was progressing in the U.S., but said the campaign would still have to push Fox on the issue.

¶7. (SBU) Comment The Fox Administration turn about comes after days of campaign-related criticism of the President and his team for a tepid response to U.S. measures. While the Fox Administration held fast to its balanced set of talking points regarding the deployment of National Guard (not militarization, only support), once the U.S. Senate passed authorization of the fences (seen in Mexico as a "wall") the public response reached the hysteria of last December when the Sensenbrenner bill was passed. We can expect similar ebbs and flows in the public reaction -- prodded by the various campaigns -- as the U.S. Senate discussions proceed.

Garza